Improve Your Programs with Focus Groups

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Focus Groups..

- Are guided group discussion to generate a rich understanding of a participant’s experience & beliefs
- Are not educational sessions or support groups. You are there to listen & learn from them, not vice versa.

data = discussion
Conducting a Focus Group

- **Planning**- goal, ° of structure, # in group, # of groups, how long, script
- **Recruiting**- cohesive group, screening criteria, follow-up
- **Moderating**- trained/neutral/compatible
- **Analysis**- need assistant, begins immediately
Developing the Moderator Guide

- Review program goals and objectives
- Develop general list of questions
- Decide on level of structure
- Prepare rough draft based on questions which address goals and objectives
- Share and revise
- Pilot test and revise
Sequencing the Questions

Introduction
- present purpose, goals and objectives
- describe procedure
- describe how will information be used

Build rapport

Interview

Closure
Questioning Hints

- Use open ended questions
- Ask general questions before specific ones
- Ask positive questions before negative ones
- Keep questions simple (avoid jargon)
- Ask participants to think back
- Use examples carefully
- Provide probes for moderator
Recruiting Participants

- Number of groups and group size
- Finding participants
- Screening participants
- Giving and receiving information
- Offering incentives
- Minimizing no-show rates
Finding Participants

- Existing lists
- Random sampling
- Referrals
- Intercepts
- Open solicitation
Group Composition

- Review goals and objectives
- Homogeneous vs. heterogeneous
- Demographics
- Experiences/behaviors
- Relationship to other participants
- Avoid “experts”
Analysis

- Best when done soon!
- Best when done systematically:
  - note taking, transcribing, coding, reporting
- Look for:
  - consistent themes, patterns, comparisons & needles in the hay stack
- Based a continuum:
  
  raw data - description - interpretation - recommendation
Limitations

- Inappropriate Issues
- Unrealistic Expectations
- Cannot Generalize Numbers!!!